

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

USIA-15 ACDA-19 IO-14 OMB-01 AID-20 DPW-01 EUR-25

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R 240530Z OCT 73

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6340

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

CINCPAC

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 VIENTIANE 7282

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS, PGOV, LA

SUBJECT: POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE INFLUX OF LPF PERSONNEL

REF: A. VIENTIANE 7224

B. VIENTIANE 7182

C. VIENTIANE 7147

D. VIENTIANE 7117

E. VIENTIANE 7073

F. VIENTIANE 7047

BEGIN SUMMARY: THE RELAXED TEMPO OF LAO POLITICS
INCREASED SHARPLY LAST WEEK WITH THE DRAMATIC INFLUX
OF LARGE NUMBERS OF LPF ARMED TROOPS AND OTHER PERSONNEL
AND MANY TONS OF WEAPONS, AMMUNITION AND OTHER
SUPPLIES INTO VIENTIANE. THE ARRIVAL OF LPF
CONTINGENTS OCCURED IN PURSUANCE OF ARTICLE 10 OF
THE PROTOCOL, BUT CONSERVATIVE RLGAFF GENERALS WERE
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NEITHER MENTALLY NOR ORGANIZATIONALLY PREPARED FOR

THE RAPID IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS PROVISION. WHILE SOUVANNA, AT THE OUTSET, INTERPRETED THE LPF ARRIVAL BENIGNLY AS THE FIRST STEP IN IMPLEMENTING THE PROTOCOL LEADING TO THE FORMATION OF THE NEW COALITION GOVERNMENT, THE CONSERVATIVE GENERALS NERVOUSLY AND SUSPICIOUSLY ACCUSED THE LPF OF CIRCUMVENTING THE JCIA MECHANISM PROVIDED IN THE PROTOCOL. THEY FINALLY PERSUADED SOUVANNA ON OCTOBER 18 TO HALT THE LPF INFLUX UNTIL THE JCIA WAS ACTIVATED.

VIENTIANE REMAINS CALM, BUT THE LPF'S NEW MILITARY MUSCLE HAS INCREASED CONSERVATIVE DISCONTENT WITH SOUVANNA'S POLICIES. THE ATMOSPHERE HAS BEEN EMPOISONED, RENDERING IT UNLIKELY THAT THE NEW GOVERNMENT WILL BE FORMED BY NOVEMBER 7 AS SOUVANNA HOPED. ALTHOUGH THEY ARE AWARE THAT POLITICAL CHANGES NOW UNDERWAY, WHEREVER THEY MAY LEAD, ARE IRREVERSIBLE, THE CONSERVATIVES RESENT WHAT THEY CALL SOUVANNA'S HIGH-HANDED WAY OF IMPLEMENTING THE PROTOCOL UNILATERALLY. END SUMMARY.

1. WHEN LPF PLENIPOTENTIARY PHOUMI VONGVICHIT SCURRIED BACK TO REPORT TO SAM NEUA RIGHT AFTER THE SIGNING OF THE PROTOCOL SEPTEMBER 14, AS HE HAD EARLIER AFTER THE FEBRUARY 21 AGREEMENT, MOST PARTICIPANTS IN THE LAO POLITICAL DRAMA SETTLED BACK COMFORTABLY FOR A LENGTHY INTERMISSION BEFORE THE NEXT ACT.

2. BUT THE SPPED AND MASSIVE SIZE OF THE INFLUX OF LPF TROOPS AND WAR MATERIEL INTO VIENTIANE LAST WEEK UPSET EVERYONE'S EQUANIMITY, EXCEPT SOUVANNA'S. HE VIEWED IT AS THE FIRST STEP TOWARD FORMATION OF THE NEW COALITION GOVERNMENT AND OF THE PROCESS BY WHICH HE HOPES TO WEAN THE LPF AWAY FROM THE NORTH VIETNAMESE AND BACK INTO THE LAO MAINSTREAM. IN A WEEK, THE NUMBER OF ARMED COMMUNISTS IN THE CITY INCREASED ALMOST SEVEN TIMES, FROM 58 TO 380. THIS EVIDENCE OF POLITICAL CHANGE CAME TOO FAST FOR THE CONSERVATIVE FACTIONS, WHO VIEW THE PRESENT TREND AS RUNNING COUNTER TO THEIR INTERESTS.

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3. THEIR FEARS ARE UNDERSTANDABLE FROM THEIR POINT OF VIEW, ALTHOUGH THE GENERAL ATMOSPHERE OF VIENTIANE REMAINS CALM. THE COMMUNIST TROOPS PROCEEDED DIRECTLY FROM THE AIRPORT TO THEIR BILLETS, WHERE A FEW NERVOUS GUARDS, IN OVER-SIZED NEW UNIFORMS, NOW PEER OWLISHLY OVER THE PARAPET. THEY ARE NOT ROAMING THE STREETS, AND IT WILL BE CONSIDERABLE TIME BEFORE THE "MIXED POLICE

PATROLS" ENVISAGED IN THE PROTOCOL ARE ESTABLISHED. NEVERTHELESS, THE POTENTIAL FOR INCIDENTS -- AND FOR ESCALATION, IN THE ABSENCE OF A FUNCTIONING JCIA -- HAS INCREASED. MOREOVER, THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF THE PRESENCE OF LPF MILITARY MUSCLE IN THE CAPITAL, AND PARTICULARLY THE ADROIT EASE WITH WHICH THE LPF CIRCUMVENTED THE JOINT COMMISSION TO IMPLEMENT THE AGREEMENT, HAVE INTRODUCED A NEW UNPREDICTABLE FACTOR INTO THE VIENTIANE POLITICAL EQUATION.

4. ALTHOUGH THE ARRIVAL OF THE LPF PERSONNEL WAS ENVISAGED IN THE PROTOCOL, THE TACTICS WHICH FACILITATED THE INFLUX WERE NOT WITHIN THE SPIRIT OF RECONCILIATION WHICH WAS TO GOVERN THE ACTIONS OF BOTH SIDES. THE PROTOCOL MADE THE LAO PARTIES JOINTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR ESTABLISHING SECURITY FORCES FOR THE CITY, BT MUTUAL AGREEMENT IN THE JCIA FORUM. BUT LPF REPRESENTATIVES REFUSED TO MEET THEIR RLG COUNTER-PARTS IN THE JCIA, TO WORK OUT MUTUALLY SATISFACTORY ARRANGEMENTS REQUIRED BY THE PROTOCOL, ON THE SPECIOUS GROUNDS THAT THE RLG WAS DELAYING PREPARATION OF NECESSARY ACCOMODATIONS. IN FACT, THE RLG MOVED WITH UNUSUAL SPEED AND COMPETENCE TO PREPARE THE BUILDINGS REQUIRED.

5. WITH HIS USUAL DISREGARD FOR SUCH DETAILS AS AVAILABLE FUNDS, ACCOMODATIONS, OR THE OPINIONS OF THE CONSERVATIVES, SOUVANNA UNILATERALLY APPROVED THE FLOW OF LPF REQUESTS FOR PERSONNEL FLIGHTS OVER THE HEADS OF THE RLG DELEGATION TO THE STILLBORN JCIA. HE STOPPED AFTER RLGAF DEPCINC GENERAL KOU PRASITH MUSTERED UP HIS COURAGE TO OBJECT VIGOROUSLY ON OCTOBER 18. THE "SOVIET AIRLIFT" HAS
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TEMPORARILY HALTED, BUT A SIZEABLE LPF MILITARY PRESENCE HAS BEEN SUCCESSFULLY INSTALLED IN VIENTIANE. WE DO NOT YET KNOW WHETHER SOUVANNA'S RED LIGHT ALSO SUPPLIES TO THE PRC AIRLIFT OF LPF PERSONNEL INTO LUANG PRABANG.

6. THE LPF'S MOTIVATIONS ARE OPEN TO DISPUTE. THEY MAY BE CONDITIONED BY THE HISTORY OF THE INCARCERATIONS (1958-59) AND ASSASSINATIONS (1962-63) OF COMMUNIST LEADERS BY THE CONSERVATIVE SIDE, AND BY THE HARASSMENT OF THE LPF COMPOUND IN VIENTIANE OVER SUBSEQUENT YEARS. WE THINK IT LIKELY THAT THE COMMUNISTS SIMPLY CONCLUDED THEY HAD TO MOVE FAST TO GET LARGE NUMBERS OF ARMED TROOPS ENSCONCED BEFORE THE CONSERVATIVES WERE ABLE TO STALL THE WHOLE PROCESS OF POLITICAL CHANGE IN THE JCIA FORUM, WITH ITS UNANIMITY RULE.

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CINCPAC

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CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

7. WE DOUBT THAT LPF MOTIVATIONS INCLUDE A CONTINGENCY PLAN TO SEIZE CONTROL OF VIENTIANE, SOMETHING FEARED BY THE CONSERVATIVES, ALTHOUGH THE LATTER HOLD THE BALANCE OF MILITARY POWER IN THE CITY. A LPF PUTSCH ATTEMPT WOULD NOT BE A LOGICAL SEQUEL TO YEAR-LONG LPF BARGAINING FOR DETAILED POLITICAL ARRANGEMENTS AND TIMETABLES IN THE AGREEMENT AND PROTOCOL.

8. HOWEVER, THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF THE COMMUNIST MILITARY PRESENCE HERE IS DISTURBING. A RECENT LPF PROPAGANDA BROADCAST BY LPF CHAIRMAN SOUPHANOUVONG INCLUDED THE PHRASE: "WE ARE MASTERS OF THE COUNTRY," DISPLAYING THE TRUCULENCE THAT HAS CHARACTERIZED LPF PRONOUNCEMENTS AND ACTIONS SINCE THE PROTOCOL WAS SIGNED. THE ATMOSPHERE HAS THUS BECOME EMPOISONED AND DOES NOT AUGUR WELL FOR FORMATION OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT IN THE WEEKS IMMEDIATELY AHEAD.

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9. ALTHOUGH WE EXPECT THAT THE LPF WILL EVENTUALLY BEGIN NOMINALLY PARTICIPATING IN MEETINGS OF THE JCIA, WE DOUBT THAT IT WILL SUBMIT TO CONSERVATIVE DEMANDS FOR HEADCOUNT AND BAGGAGE CHECK OF ITS ARRIVING PERSONNEL. INSTEAD, THE LPF WILL CITE ARTICLE 24(B) OF THE PROTOCOL FOR SO-CALLED "DIPLOMATIC IMMUNITY" FOR JCIA PERSONNEL. IF SOUVANNA HOLDS FIRM TO HIS ORDER OF OCTOBER 18, THE SOVIETS WILL PROBABLY NOT DISOBEY AND RESUME THE FLIGHTS. THUS, WE COULD HAVE A LULL OF UNKNOWN DURATION IN PROSPECT, THOUGH NOT ONE THAT SOUVANNA WILL LIVE WITH FOR A PROTRACTED PERIOD OF TIME. HE IS ANXIOUS TO GET THE GOVERNMENT FORMED AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE. THE LPF WILL THUS PROBABLY MAKE ARRIVAL OF THEIR CABINET MINISTERS IN VIENTIANE CONTINGENT UPON SOUVANNA'S APPROVAL FOR RESUMPTION OF THE AIRLIFT OF ADDITIONAL LPF PERSONNEL.

10. WE BELIEVE THAT THE LPF'S PRIMARY GOAL AT THIS STAGE IS TO FORM THE NEW GOVERNMENT, NOT TAKE OVER VIENTIANE AS THE CONSERVATIVES FEAR. BUT WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENS IN THIS CONTEXT MAY BE LESS IMPORTANT THAN WHAT THE CONSERVATIVES FEAR WILL HAPPEN. THERE IS ALWAYS THE CHANGE THAT THE LPF WILL PRESS TOO HARD AND ENGENDER A PREEMPTIVE CONSERVATIVE MILITARY MOVE. THE CONSERVATIVES ARE MUTTERING DARKLY, BUT THERE IS NO EVIDENCE SO FAR THAT THEY ARE CONSIDERING USE OF FORCE TO HALT A TREND OF EVENTS WHICH IS PROBABLY IRREVERSIBLE. THEY ARE AWARE THAT SUCH A MOVE WOULD BENEFIT NO ONE, LEAST OF ALL THE CONSERVATIVES THEMSELVES.

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